

Brethren Evangelist

"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life."—Jesus

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Announcement

Every reader of the paper is requested to read "Publisher's Announcements" on page 14. There are some things you should know for your own benefit, and some things for our benefit. Some of the departments of the paper may not appear in their usual place for the next two or three weeks. Information touching these and other matters will be found on page 14, to which please turn and read.

Doctrine and Morality.

With that shallowness which is characteristic of modern thought on religious subjects, there has appeared a disposition in some quarters to find a wide distinction between doctrine and morality as to their respective ethical value. It has been used on the one hand to exalt doctrine at the expense of morality, and on the other to exalt morality at the expense of doctrine. The first exhibits a tendency to extenuate shortcomings in the personal record provided the formula of belief is according to the orthodox standards, while the second is able to tolerate and even to embrace the veriest heretic, or a full-blown infidel, provided his life is ordered according to the current precepts of the moral law. Many a sinner will try to escape the obligations of religion by assuring himself, and assuring you, that he is as good as any baptized person of his acquaintance, and better than some. Brother Ordinance will drive sharp bargains, and get the better of his neighbor in a cow trade, a thing which our moral non-professor would scorn to do on his honor. There is said to be honor among thieves, and we think that if this be a fact, it is just so much to their credit. It is a sort of redeeming feature in the most abandoned phase of our frail humanity. That there is honor among the unconverted is undoubtedly true, and creditable. We heartily agree with whoever first said it, that a man can't possibly be a better sinner by being a worse one. And we also venture to predict that no sinner will be punished in the world to come or anywhere else for being a decent man in some respects, or in many respects, while traveling through this world. On the other hand, we are far from the opinion that a professor of the religion of Jesus Christ adds either to his credit, honor or usefulness by

being worldly, sharp, unfair, untrustworthy, grasping, and as it sometimes happens, dishonest in his business methods. Perhaps he is sheltering himself behind the imagination that his adherence to the articles of belief, his championship of the apostolic mode of baptism, or whatever other form of doctrine he has selected for ballast, will keep his ship sailing merrily over the billows straight toward the blessed haven. He is unfortunate, to say the least; unfortunate because he leaves a muddy wake behind him, and it may be still more unfortunate in the disillusioning which perhaps awaits his future experience. What is to become of the tree of doctrine which fails to bring forth the fruits of holiness and godliness?

The moralist errs, but not so perilously, in divorcing doctrine from morals. Not so perilously we say, for we cannot help believing that the unbeliever who lives decently will fare better in the judgment than the believer who lives indecently. But nevertheless he errs, for he fails to perceive that right doctrine is at least the theoretical, if it is not the fundamental, basis of good morals. The theological statement of faith and obedience is doctrine. The statement of Christ's atonement for sin and His present intercession for us is doctrine, and it must remain forever true that the highest, the only ultimate success in the world that is and the world to come, must be found in a mode of life which rests upon these doctrines as its fundamental basis, which finds all its impulses of love, of purpose, of holiness, of benevolence, of self-sacrifice, of heavenly aspiration, of spiritual purity in the personal Christ, whose life and words and precepts and commandments forms the doctrinal basis of our lives.

Soundness of mind, and we might add soundness of belief, is manifested in a perfect equilibrium between the doctrinal and the moral, the theoretical and the practical, the speculative and the real, or in more scriptural phrase, faith and works, in our daily lives. The well-rounded man is lopsided neither on this side nor on that. We neither hear an eloquent defense of doctrine by a dirty mouth, nor do we see the shoulders of the moralist sprouting the wings of an angel. The spiritual voyager has the most approved pattern of doctrinal sails spread to the breezes of Heaven, but at the same time his ship is ballasted by a correct life, a circumspect conduct, and between the two he is safe from whatever tempest the devil may send against him.